

Union Square Civic Advisory Committee
Meeting Notes 4/8/14

I. Introduction

Wig Zamore, chairman of the CAC, welcomes and opens the discussion for public comment.

II. Public Comment Period

- Reiterate the need to hire a developer with experience building commercial; not just residential
- Representative from SCC speaks on behalf of Link Somerville Advisory Team to present a draft of the team's equity standards. These standards might be valuable when considering the various proposals.

III. Meeting Format, Process

Edward O'Donnell, Director of Economic Development, thanks attendees for joining, acknowledges Alderman Houston. Explains that the developer selected will be expected to work with neighbors, Parsons Brinkerhoff, and the MBTA. Notes that the Powderhouse School process is illustrative—in that process, the community advisory group offered a list of recommendations for the City to consider, with one proposal selected as most advantageous. This process will be slightly different because the City released an RFQ instead of an RFP as it did with the Powderhouse School.

IV. Discussion of Master Development Teams

US2 (Chicago)

- Lake Shore East – friend from Chicago says it's great
- Liked their video and liked that they have someone on the team *from* Somerville
- 2nd mortgage program to ensure that local residents can get affordable housing
- Only developer to bring on a whole community engagement team
- Scale: they showed the tallest buildings but also smaller scale, nice streetscapes
- Negative: Could they be too big? Even with a great team, there has to be a great relationship with the principal and the City
- Liked that they used several architectural firms—brings diversity (and strong architects)
- University Village seems most applicable to Somerville, and that was 2x the size of anything we're looking to do and was created using a blank slate—very different conditions than USQ
- Seem to understand that USQ isn't for the faint of heart; acknowledged challenges/opp's
- Experience with infill development, adaptive reuse
- Net-zero buildings; some confidence and experience building these

Gerding Edlen (Portland)

- Lots of west coast experience; most energy-conscious of all teams
- Seemed willing (and able!) to accommodate NPOs and artist groups
- Attentiveness to community in Portland has been fantastic. Their model in Portland is a national model; the type of development we should want in USQ
- Will really listen to the community; talked about engaging schools, neighborhood, artists
- Portland and Somerville scales are very similar

- Sometimes it's good to bring in an outsider
- Most exciting of all teams; envision 21st century development using TOD principles; way above others in terms of the tools and technology they will use for sustainability
- Actual buildings were very impressive
- Fort Point building: Mimi concerned that condos were oddly laid out and materials weren't high-quality; units here were very expensive
- Talked about phasing as a challenge→impressive.
- Impressive team roster- very well thought out (acoustics, wind experts, etc.)
- Possible concern about artist displacement on A Street project, though the Fort Point artist group provided a letter of recommendation during this process

Samuels & Associates

- Clarification: Abbey did older development at Fenway, Samuels more recent developer
- Developed Mecca in Grove Hall which Boston really wanted to see happen
- Mostly known for retail and mixed-use; some work at Assembly Sq a while back
- Liked answers to supplemental Qs re: willingness to work with small business community
- Seemed well versed in how to phase projects
- Concern: bought post office but they have no plan for it yet
- Not very strong portfolio outside of grocery, retail

Abbey Group

- Presentation was almost "embarrassingly weak" but they do pretty relevant work
 - Perhaps just "down to earth"? Less showmanship?
- Landmark Square was an "attitude setter" for neighborhood; beautifully done architecture
- Good portion of office space within their developments
- If they go with the people listed on their team (which may or may not happen), impressive team
- Seem to have candid, unique ideas for various parcels
- Frankly pointed out challenges of their other developments and how they overcame these challenges
- Still seem to be strong residential developers above all else

Fallon

- Explained and really looked ahead at future and challenges within Union Square
- Lots of depth and experience
- Practical alternative to some of the other "legacy creators"
- Presentation was fantastic
- Great projects, but they're big and at a much larger scale. Without partners, does not seem to relate to infill type development at USQ
- Included startup spaces throughout lifecycle of project, including space for MassChallenge. Helped to create an innovation economy in the Seaport district, an area that others had long avoided or failed to redevelop. Seaport was a very, very challenging area to redevelop (poor access, infrastructure, etc).
- Experience working with MBTA (silver line), willingness to integrate alternative transportation like Hubway
- Strong financial capacity
- Strong experience with R&D; strong innovation and ability to turn a place into a destination

V. Public Comment Period

- Somerville FF Assoc: exciting to see developers that are so well-qualified, but all of the teams have a glaring omission – we need to address public safety. The Public Safety building in USQ should be condemned; need police and FF in USQ to address needs as they arise. Design and traffic flow should be able to accommodate vehicles like ladder trucks.
- Growing commercial tax base will provide additional resources to fund services like public safety; as such – important that CAC remembers to focus on growing commercial vs. residential
- US2 talked about making USQ innovative and artsy; anticipated growth in Boynton Yards
- Must consider adaptive reuse ability; environmental aspect; and firms' ability to listen to community so that we ensure good design
- Teams with diversified presenters were more representative of who we would likely be dealing with on a regular basis; will not typically work with principal on day-to-day basis
- Caution for residential developers
- Did not like development teams that claimed “no weaknesses”
- Consider which teams seem most likely to put local residents to work; what role for unions?

VI. Voting

- Each CAC member asked to vote on top four preferred development teams
- Three clear winners after first round: Gerding Edlen, Abbey Group and Federal Realty
- Second round of voting to select a fourth choice among US2, HYM and Fallon
- After second round of voting, US2 voted in to final round